

Dear Woodbridge Board of Education Members and BRS Administrative Team,

We write to you today as scared and frustrated as we were when Governor Lamont first announced the decision that schools would return to in-person learning at full capacity. While we have received specifics from our administrative team on ways they will attempt to mitigate the risks, the truth has not changed— at Beecher Road School, we are unable to follow the basic CDC guidelines outlined to keep us as safe as possible. **Furthermore, we do not believe that we have the required staffing and resources to support a simultaneous in-school and remote learning track, as currently proposed by the WBOE and our school leaders.** If we open under the current plan, our school and greater community will be put at heightened risk.

Another [WEA survey](#) was conducted this week to capture teacher input and concerns regarding the reopening plan. Almost 100% of the staff (96%) responded to this survey and conveyed significant fear about returning to school. Consistent to the previous survey, **83% of the teachers have expressed not feeling safe to return to school. However, 57% of the faculty would be returning to teach because they are reliant on their salary and benefits.** Is that a school climate we want to be creating for our teachers and our students - one that forces teachers into the building when they are feeling unsafe? While we all agreed that remote teaching is not ideal, a significant number of teachers (97%) feel this modality will allow a more optimal method of engaging with students that does not negatively impact the health and safety of students and teachers. Below are additional concerns we would like to make you aware of that were also captured in this survey:

- 97% of teachers plan to return if the school year starts with distance learning, while **only 57% of teachers plan to return if the school year starts with in-person learning.**
- 27% of our teachers plan to work remotely or to request some type of leave during this global emergency.
- 64% of our teachers believe that they cannot meet the social, emotional, and academic needs of students with the in-person model.
- 77% of our teachers feel they are currently better able to serve their students through distance learning.

Here are our main concerns:

- There continue to be concerns regarding the safety protocols that have not been fully addressed that place students and teachers at risk (i.e, dismissal, classroom capacity, specials, eating lunch in classroom unmasked).
- The CDC recommends that everyone stay six feet apart, confirmed by [Dr. Fauci in his most recent press conference with Governor Lamont](#), in which he states that universal use of masks, avoiding crowded places, and maintaining a six foot distance are essential factors in mitigating risk. The governor has relaxed such requirements and merely asked schools to maintain as much social distancing “as feasible.” This is unacceptable. The recent parent FAQ promised that desks in classrooms would be 4-6 feet apart. Four feet apart is not enough. We also do not have a guarantee every classroom can even fulfill that promise of having four feet between each desk. In several classrooms, desks are currently only able to be spaced three feet apart.
- The promise of using cohorts as a mitigating factor is an empty promise. Administration admits that there are multiple cohorts within a day for each child—their bus cohort, their classroom cohort, and for some, their extended day cohort. Adding in all the additional adults that will be coming into classrooms—including specialist teachers and some special education teachers and teaching assistants—the “cohort” is further compromised. The staff also comes with their own cohorts - cohorts made up of their families who are working with others and their children’s school.
- Students will be eating lunch and snacks in the classroom with their masks off. We have not been told who is watching students during this lunch time. Is it classroom teachers? Is it another adult, hence compromising the cohort even further? How is it safe to have all students take their masks off to eat lunch/snacks in the classroom? Knowing that COVID is aerosolized, the fact that 20+ students will have their masks off for a period of time of perhaps more than 20 minutes presents a very high risk.
- There have been no safety accommodations mentioned for the specialists who are exposed to hundreds of students each day. Some specialists even see the entire student body throughout their regular work week.

Their schedule will look the same as usual -- no time for hand washing, sanitizing spaces, and transition time in the hallways is not provided. Yet again, the classroom cohort fallacy is exposed.

- As students will have both lunch and specials in the classroom, they will be sitting at their desks, unable to move about the classroom (except for our 20 minute recess) for six hours each day. How is this acceptable?
- Clear, safety-informed instructional guidelines and safety protocols have yet to be provided for faculty, especially regarding mask wearing and distancing throughout the building. For example, the FAQ promised that students would receive “small group and 1:1 instruction” in the classroom, negating the CDC guideline for teachers to safely maintain six feet distance from any student. Secondly, protocols have not been provided for teachers regarding how and when students will remove their masks for breaks, and for safety when students do not comply with mask use. Also, the risk of the spread of COVID-19 is higher every time a child plays with their mask. There are numerous details to be worked out with only weeks until school starts.
- Administration has assured parents that desk shields will help make closer teacher-student contact possible, yet such barriers do not provide a zero-risk solution. They do not address all possible modes of transmission, such as aerosol transmission, or fully protect anyone from COVID-19. Barriers do not replace the need to maintain six feet of separation between individuals when possible (see [study](#) from University of Washington). The barriers also only allow students to see straight ahead, meaning classroom socialization will be minimal and in complete opposition of the usual Beecher mode of instruction.
- While OSHA COVID-19 guidelines state that employers should provide full PPE, including masks, Beecher Road teachers are being provided masks only by request. It has been stated that face shields “may” be provided.
- The information given to parents makes it seem like school in the fall will be “back to normal” and that school will address the social and emotional needs of students. This could not be farther from the truth. Students will be wearing masks and being told they need to be socially distant. That means that there cannot be small group activities or partner work throughout the day. Also, by necessity, many lessons will look like distance learning. The teacher presents the material, then the children do the work on their own, many times on an iPad. Also, all of the comfortable areas that make the classroom feel welcoming will have to go away: no more rugs for whole group lessons, no bean bag chairs, and no partnership areas in the classroom. In normal school years, a child may come into school and feel worried about leaving their parents as they walk into Kindergarten. Normally, a teacher walks up to them, takes their hand, and tries to make them feel comfortable. How does a teacher accomplish this from six feet away while wearing a mask? In-class teaching is going to be far from normal. As teachers, we cannot be the best versions of ourselves if we are constantly in fear and real danger of sickness and death.
- As of this writing, the state of Connecticut is still in Phase Two and our statewide positivity rate has reached 1.4%. The governor has not officially allowed for there to be indoor gatherings of more than 25 people. Meanwhile, [the American Academy of Pediatrics reports that there has been a 90% increase in COVID-19 cases in US children within the last four weeks](#). How is it conscionable to have close to 1,000 teachers and students together all day in the same building? We are knowingly putting our entire school staff, students, and community in harm’s way. **As previously stated, if we have a portion of students receiving remote learning, it does not reduce the number of students in the classroom, as we do not currently have additional faculty to accommodate for this model. If our plan is to add a substitute to reduce class sizes, how do we ensure consistency of learning? How do we ensure that proper cohorting is maintained with a plan that is intended to be “fluid”?**
- Professional development, scheduled to start in two weeks, has yet to be finalized and will not be held completely virtually, creating an unsafe environment for faculty and staff.
- Acknowledging the need for a significantly increased demand for substitute teachers (for when teachers undoubtedly fall ill), the State of Connecticut has changed the qualifications for substitute teachers, merely requiring that they be 18 years of age and hold a high school degree. This practice is negligent, and Beecher Road will not be immune to a substitute teacher shortage.

We respectfully request the following considerations to be addressed before school reopens in any capacity to ensure the safety of the faculty and the students:

1. ***Start the year with full remote learning for at least the first ten weeks, at which point we can properly and thoughtfully consider next steps. This will not only allow for a safer start for teachers, staff and students, it is also in the best interest of public health.***

The safety protocols recommended by health and government officials—including reduced class sizes, social distancing, cohorts, and protocols for daily monitoring of staff and student symptoms—**are simply not feasible for our school district.** Because we care deeply about our students and our school community, we contend that even a small percentage of avoidable deaths is an unconscionable loss. None of our lives are disposable. We closed our school in March for far less cases, yet we still know this virus is just as deadly today.

We must shift our efforts towards strengthening remote learning now, so as not to replicate the haphazard emergency transition to online learning in the spring. With clarity that school reopening in the fall will be remote, educators and communities can focus on creative and collaborative preparations for teaching remotely. On a state and federal level, educators are also demanding childcare subsidies and economic relief for families during the pandemic -- including access to technology and high-speed internet for *all* students. **More meaningful, interactive, and equitable distance learning is possible, but it requires time, support, and resources to develop and implement. Some of the many practices and accommodations that must be planned for include the following:**

- Increased special education staff to meet the individualized educational plans of students
- Live, interactive, small group virtual instruction
- Time and teacher professional development for virtual instructional design
- Time for PLCs to create digital curriculum planning (including video lessons)
- A universal learning platform for all students (aligned to many other districts and states)
- Assessments that are appropriately adapted for virtual instruction
- Clear, schoolwide expectations and routines for teachers, students, and families
- Digital community building and digital competency for students
- Multimodal, predictable, and consistent communication with parents
- Methods for providing helpful, interactive, consistent feedback and assessments for students
- Creating and disseminating kits with non-digital tools for remote learning at home
- Access to print books

2. ***Properly implement the CDC Guidelines at Beecher Road School.***

- Implement widespread testing and contact tracing for the entire Woodbridge community.
- Hire additional staff: nursing, custodial, teachers, and mental health professionals.
- Ensure that all desks are placed at least six feet apart with smaller class sizes that meet the safety guidelines.
- Provide increased bus capacity and staff.
- Provide full PPE for all faculty, school staff, and students.
- Implement CDC-approved cleaning protocols and procedures.
- Review and update the HVAC system in alignment with the [Department of Public Health School Ventilation Guidelines](#), including a review of HEPA filters, and exhaust systems in bathrooms and isolation rooms.

As dedicated professionals, we ask that Woodbridge models leadership in our state by making the safest decision for families, students, teachers, and our entire community.

Respectfully signed,

Cathy Zdrowski, WEA President/Special Education Teacher
Nancy Smerekanicz, WEA Vice President/Grade 6 Teacher
Tim Rourke, WEA Vice President of Personnel/Grade 5 Teacher
Kim Kline Franklin, WEA Secretary/Grade 6 Teacher
Joseph DePalma, WEA Treasurer/Grade 2 Teacher
Nicole Rizzo, WEA Communications Director/Grade 2 Teacher
Barbara Ahern, MAG Teacher
Robin Gerber, MAG Teacher
Louise Golden, MAG Teacher
Kris Hart-Rooney, MAG Teacher
Nicole Chick, Kindergarten Teacher
Megan Cofrancesco, Kindergarten Teacher
Jeanne Dempsey, Kindergarten Teacher
Lisa Farnen, Kindergarten Teacher
Allison Grabowski, Kindergarten Teacher
Teresa Ramia, Kindergarten Teacher
Carrie Fanelli, Grade 1 Teacher
Christina Thompson, Grade 1 Teacher
Shannon Wyman-Anctil, Grade 1 Teacher
Peter Halsey, Grade 2 Teacher
John Hutchinson, Grade 3 Teacher
Aimee Meacham, Grade 3 Teacher
Visna Ngov, Grade 3 Teacher
Jacqueline Scalia, Grade 3 Teacher
Mary Vincitorio, Grade 3 Teacher
Elena Lavigne, Grade 4 Teacher
Jason Nolan, Grade 4 Teacher
Michelle Shepard, Grade 4 Teacher
Michele Waldron, Grade 4 Teacher
Kristina Conroy, Grade 5 Teacher
Cheri Guerra, Grade 5 Teacher
Kristen Horvath, Grade 5 Teacher
Kevin McHugh, Grade 5 Teacher
Leigh Mulligan, Grade 5 Teacher
Carson Echeverry, Grade 6 Teacher
Katherine McCollom, Grade 6 Teacher
Melissa Caporossi, Special Education Teacher
Beth Greene, Special Education Teacher
Kathy Marlor, Special Education Teacher
Meghan Saunders, Special Education Teacher
Sue Simoniello, Special Education Teacher
Stephanie Goldberg, Spanish Teacher
Emily Jacober, Spanish Teacher
Larissa Crocco, Teacher-Librarian
Lori Patrick, Teacher-Librarian
Heather Trofimchik, STEAM Teacher
Arianne Buzzard, Health Teacher
Linda Acheson, Visual Arts Teacher
Kristine Rose, Primary Grades Psychologist
Kayla Widmeyer, Intermediate Grades School Psychologist
Kristin DeManche, Social Worker
Elizabeth Heagney, Language Arts Specialist
Monique MacDonald, Language Arts Specialist
Teresa Nakouzi, Language Arts Specialist
Taylor Da Silva, ESL Teacher/Language Arts Specialist
Maureen Krawec, Math Specialist
Jean Molot, Math Specialist
Lanna Moore, Speech Language Pathologist
Christina Renzoni, Speech Language Pathologist



A Kindergarten classroom before: Students spread around the room for partner reading during Reader's Workshop. Communal supplies are on the tables for sharing and collaboration. Teaching assistant close by to keep students engaged.



A Kindergarten classroom after: Individual facing forward tables. Most of the other furniture and rugs have been removed to accommodate the tables. Every table will have a privacy shield with view only to front, no way to see classmates next to them.

Anonymous teacher comments from this week's WEA survey:

"I often tell my students that my classroom is a safe place for them to learn, grow, and be themselves. Right now, I feel like it isn't. With this virus my classroom and all of our classrooms have the potential to be very dangerous places. I am not comfortable being in school. We as teachers can do our best to cover it up, but our kids are smart, and they will start to feel the anxiety we feel. I think we should return in stages and hope that it is safer to fully return sometime in the winter or spring. I want to be in school with all the staff, teachers, and students I love when it is safe to do so rather than be there knowing any one of them can become extremely ill and possibly never return."

"I want to clarify - I will return to in-person teaching only because I don't have another option."

"In-person learning will be teachers in a constant state of panic trying to police bodies. Much more safe and meaningful interactions can happen remotely. Distance learning is the better choice for everyone's social and emotional well-being and academic needs can be better met as well."

"I feel incredibly unsafe going back to school in a full, in person model. I feel like my health and safety, that of my family, my colleagues, and my students are being put at risk unnecessarily. I am frustrated that CDC guidelines have become flexible when they should be rigid. I am angry that teachers are being expected to go into situations that violate the Phase Two guidelines for the state when few others are. . . I don't feel safe, in any way, going back to school under the current plan."

"I cannot believe that we are being asked to provide a place of social and emotional well-being, yet we will be dressed up so children cannot see our faces, and the children will have to stay away from each other and us."

"I do not feel parents have been educated as to how our day and classrooms will look. To keep younger students at their desk for 6 hours a day is not developmentally appropriate, but necessary. Children will also be very limited in their interactions with one another. I believe parents do not understand what the "new" format will be like. I think they are thinking of school as it always has been."

"I am upset that we are using children as an experiment. Most adult places, including our own BOE, are meeting virtually. Why are children being considered less important? No one is immune to this virus."

"I can't believe even with other districts in Connecticut going hybrid, or some starting with distance learning, Woodbridge Administration/BOE continues to disregard the risks we will be facing with all students and teachers 900+ students all in school at the same time. It is a total disregard of teachers and students' health and safety."

"How effective will teachers be if they come to in-school learning being fearful, angry and upset? Do parents truly understand what school will look like and be like for their children? Does the BOE truly understand that they will lose valuable teachers? Where is the equity with not giving the same choice to teachers that they are giving to parents regarding opting for remote learning? Many teachers have given up their summers with devoting time to the issues of reopening. These same teachers were working 12 hour days during distance learning. People will burn out with zero down time. Why are the needs of the teachers not being addressed? If a doctor recommends that a teacher only be able to go to distance learning, why is the superintendent allowed to question this?"